

plainly enough that he had by no means lost faith in the coming day of reckoning with these heroic Hollanders and Zealanders. Had these heroic Hollanders and Zealanders fought and endured for ten years merely that the irreconcilable bigot and tyrant might gain time to recuperate for their destruction? Assuredly not, if William could help it. The great thing, in these circumstances, was to maintain the union of the provinces negotiated at Ghent, and William toiled hard to prevent his antagonist from dealing a counter stroke in this direction. The task ultimately proved too difficult for his diplomatic powers, and if he outwitted the shallow Don John into retreat he outwitted himself in his confidence that he could hold the provinces together in permanent alliance on the basis of toleration. He was almost alone in his consistent adherence to this great principle. He was prepared to tolerate even the Anabaptists in spite of the opposition of the trustiest of his associates like St Aldegonde. His consistency in the cause of real as opposed to sectarian liberty of conscience drew upon him the distrust and dislike of the bigots of both creeds. The Catholic nobles and prelates of the Belgian provinces, who followed the Duke of Aerschot, were, moreover, envious of his power as well as hostile to his creed, and invited the Archduke Mathias of Austria to assume the post of governor in place of Don John. William parried the move by concurring in the nominal rule of the harmless lad, and retained the real direction of affairs as his lieutenant-governor. The mass of the people willingly submitted to his rule as the only alternative to the misgovernment of the previous ten years. He found in the people, in fact, his chief stay against a shifty and factious aristocracy. His second entry into Brussels in his capacity of lieutenant-governor was greeted with renewed popular acclamation. He was to all appearance dictator, not of two insignificant provinces but of the united Netherlands, with the democracy, if not the aristocracy, of Flanders and Brabant as well as Holland and Zealand at his back. He was supreme in the States-General, which, in the agreement with the Archduke Mathias, had assumed the sovereign function vindicated by the Great Privilege a century earlier. He had at last succeeded in concluding a treaty of alliance with Queen Elizabeth, who